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Using the New Food Label To Choose Healthier Foods



A large-type publication

Food and Drug Administration
Food Safety and Inspection Service

United States
Department of
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eed help in choosing a healthy diet? The new food label can help.

With new government regulations in force, **the new label promises to give more complete, believable and easy-to-use nutrition information than ever before.** Whether you follow a special diet or simply want to “eat healthy,” you’ll find the new label a helpful tool for choosing the right foods.

Eating the right foods is important because research shows that what we eat can affect our health—today and in the future. For example:

- A diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol can help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

- A diet rich in fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of some cancers.

- A diet with enough calcium is linked to a reduced risk of osteoporosis, a condition in which bones soften and become brittle.

- A diet low in sodium may help reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a risk factor for heart attack and stroke.

New information on the front, side, and even the back of food packages can help you spot foods that offer these and other healthful benefits.

What should you look for? This brochure will tell you. It describes key parts of the new label and explains how the information can help you meet your particular nutrition needs.

FROZEN MIXED VEGETABLES

IN SAUCE



NET WT. 8.9 oz. (252 g)

The Front Label

The front label is your starting point. This is where the name of the product appears. It is here that manufacturers often place statements describing the nutritional qualities of their products. The government has set strict conditions under which these statements can be used. So when you see them, **you can believe them.**

There are two kinds of statements:

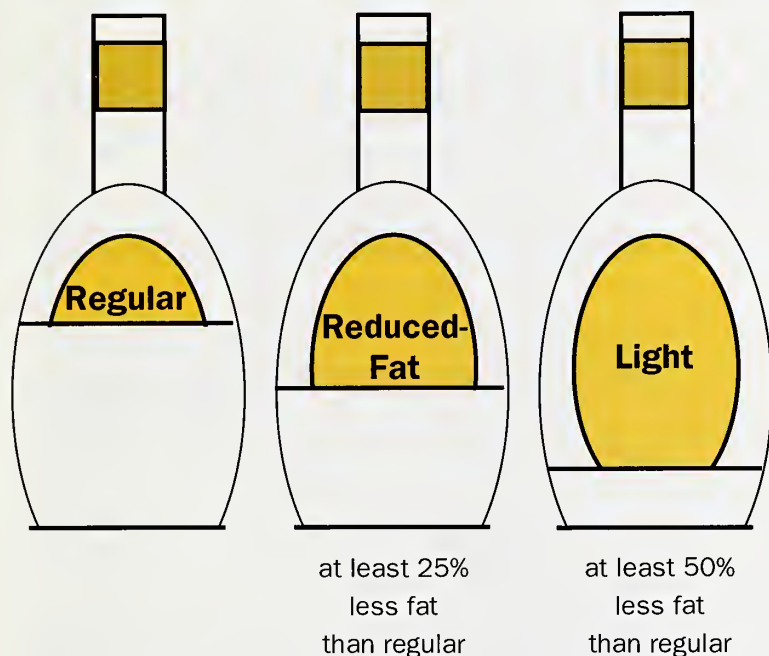
1. **Nutrient Claims.**

Examples include “low fat,” “high fiber,” “reduced calories,” and “cholesterol free.”

Some of these claims make a comparison to the “regular” version of the food or a similar food. For example, a *reduced-fat* claim on a jar of Italian dressing means the food has at least 25 percent less fat than regular Italian dressing. A *light* Italian dressing has at least 50 percent less fat *or* one-third fewer calories than the regular one.

Other claims show that a food is high or

Example of Comparative and Absolute Nutrient Claims: Fat Reduction in Italian Salad Dressing



Low-Fat

not more than
3 grams of fat per
2-tbsp serving

tblsp = tablespoon



Fat-Free

less than one-half
gram of fat per
2-tbsp serving

low in a nutrient. For example, *low-fat* Italian dressing has 3 grams of fat or less per 2-tablespoon (30-gram) serving. *Fat-free* Italian dressing has less than half a gram of fat per serving.

Examples of other claims you may see are “high fiber” on whole-wheat cereal and “low sodium” on canned green beans.

2. **Health Claims.**

FDA now allows claims linking a nutrient or food to the risk of a disease or health-related condition. Only health claims supported by scientific evidence are allowed.

What Can Claims Do for You?

Nutrient claims and health claims can help you quickly find foods that offer desirable nutrient levels. They can tell you if a food is low in nutrients many of us need to consume less of, such as fat, cholesterol and sodium. They also can tell you if a food is high in nutrients many of us need to consume more of, such as fiber, potassium and calcium.

For more detailed information, the claims on many products will refer you to the “Nutrition Facts,” usually on the side or back of the package.

Getting All the Facts

“Nutrition Facts” is the place to go for more complete information. Here, you can easily see how a food fits into your total daily diet. Here’s how to use “Nutrition Facts.”

Real-Life Serving Sizes

Start with serving size information. Serving sizes are the basis for measuring a food’s nutrient content. Keep in mind that serving sizes are:

- listed in both household and metric units
- uniform across product lines so that you can more easily compare the nutritional qualities of similar foods
- close to the amounts people really eat (although this doesn’t mean that serving sizes are “recommended amounts”).

Key

g = grams (about 28 g = 1 ounce)

mg = milligrams (1,000 mg = 1 gram)

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)

Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 90 Calories from Fat 30

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 3g **5%**

Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

Sodium 300mg **13%**

Total Carbohydrate 13g **4%**

Dietary Fiber 3g **12%**

Sugars 3g

Protein 3g

Vitamin A 80% • Vitamin C 60%

Calcium 4% • Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:


		Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than		65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than		20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than		300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than		2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate			300g	375g
Dietary Fiber			25g	30g


Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

%Daily Values— The Key to Healthy Eating

The amounts of certain nutrients in a food are expressed in two ways:

 in terms of the amount by weight per serving

 as a percentage (%) of the Daily Value.

Nutrient amounts and %Daily Values—a new nutrition reference tool—describe the content of one serving of the food inside the packaging.

By using the %Daily Values, you can easily determine whether a food contributes a lot or a little of a particular nutrient. A high percentage means the food contains a lot of a nutrient. A low percentage means it contains a little. You don't have to worry about doing calculations.

But if you eat more—or less—than the serving size on the label, you'll need to adjust the amounts of nutrients accordingly. For example, the serving size for ice cream is one-half cup. If you eat one cup, you would need to double the calories and the %Daily Values listed to learn the nutritional content of the portion you eat.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)

Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 90 Calories from Fat 30

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 3g	5%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 300mg	13%
Total Carbohydrate 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 80%	Vitamin C 60%
Calcium 4%	Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:

Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)

Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 90 Calories from Fat 30

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 3g **5%**

Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

13%

For example, let's say you're trying to eat less fat. You come across two different brands of frozen mixed vegetables in sauce. One of the packages lists 5% as the %Daily Value for total fat. The other package gives 15%. Which should you buy? The one with 5% because 5 is a significantly lower number than 15.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)

Servings Per Container 4

Amount Per Serving

Calories 150 Calories from Fat 90

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 10g **15%**

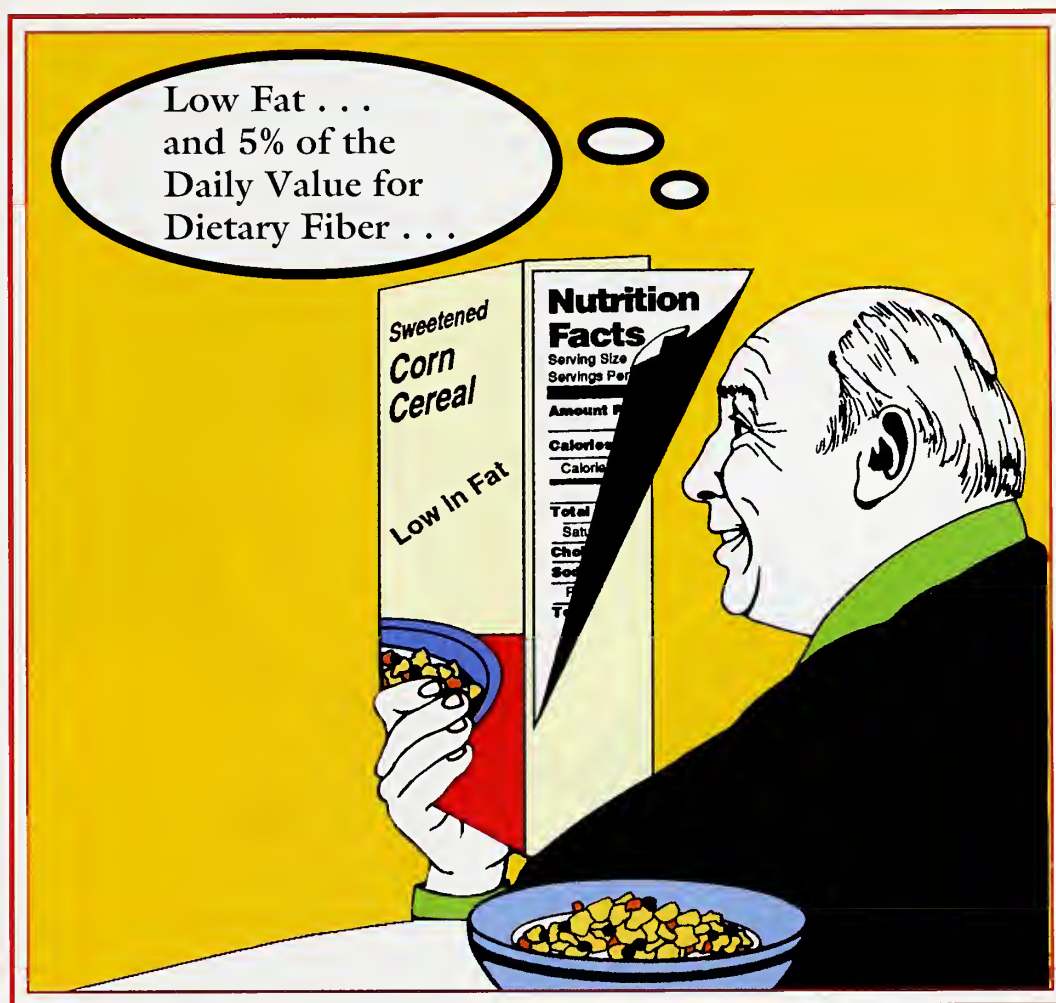
Saturated Fat 0g **0%**

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

13%

Keep in mind that %Daily Values are based on the amount of food usually eaten in one day. **So, the goal is to choose foods that together give you about 100% a day.** For nutrients that most of us need to eat more of—such as fiber and calcium—the goal

should be to eat foods that contribute *at least* 100%. For nutrients that most of us need to eat less of—such as fat, cholesterol and sodium—the goal should be to eat *no more than* 100%.

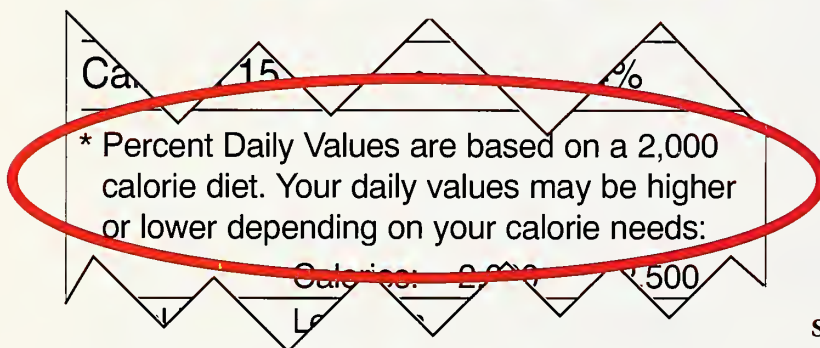


Let's use an example. Let's say you eat about 2,000 calories a day. Your total daily fat intake should then be no more than 65 grams. Since fat has 9 calories per gram, that amount equals 30% of your calories from fat—the upper limit recommended for most people, according to the government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Let's say that the food you're preparing has 16 grams of fat per serving and shows the %Daily Value for total fat per serving at 25%. What does this tell you? It tells you that all the other foods you eat that day should total 75% *or less* of the Daily Value for total fat.

Of course, you don't have to rigidly stick to the 100% total each and every day.

Think of your diet like a budget for a vacation. If you have \$1,000 for a 10-day vacation, you can spend an average of \$100 a day. If one day you want to eat at a fancy restaurant and you end up spending \$150, that's okay, as long as you make up for it by spending less on other days. So it is with %Daily Values and the foods you eat. If you "splurge" on fat during a dinner of fried foods, for example, you can make up for it the next day by eating more low-fat or nonfat foods.

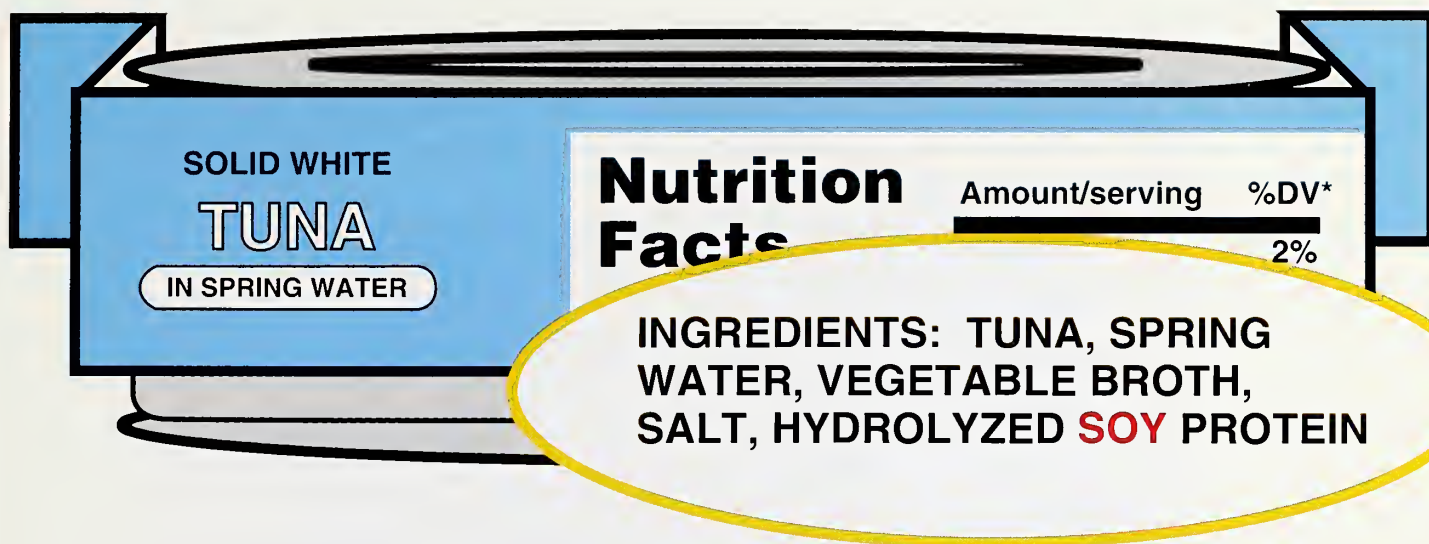


The 2,000-Calorie Basis

The nutrition panel carries a footnote explaining that the %Daily Values are based on 2,000 calories a day. Of course, not everyone eats this amount daily; some eat more, some less. Your daily calorie needs depend on many factors, such as age, height, weight, and activity level. A physician, dietitian or nutritionist can help you figure out your calorie needs.

Whatever your daily calorie intake, you still can use the %Daily Values as a reference to help you see how a particular food fits into the context of a total daily diet.

For example, let's say you eat only 1,500 calories a day, instead of 2,000. Since 1,500 is 75% of 2,000, the %Daily Values for each of the nutrients in all the foods you eat in a day should total 75, instead of 100. So, if one food provides 25% of the Daily Value for fat, all the other foods you eat that day should add up to no more than 50%.

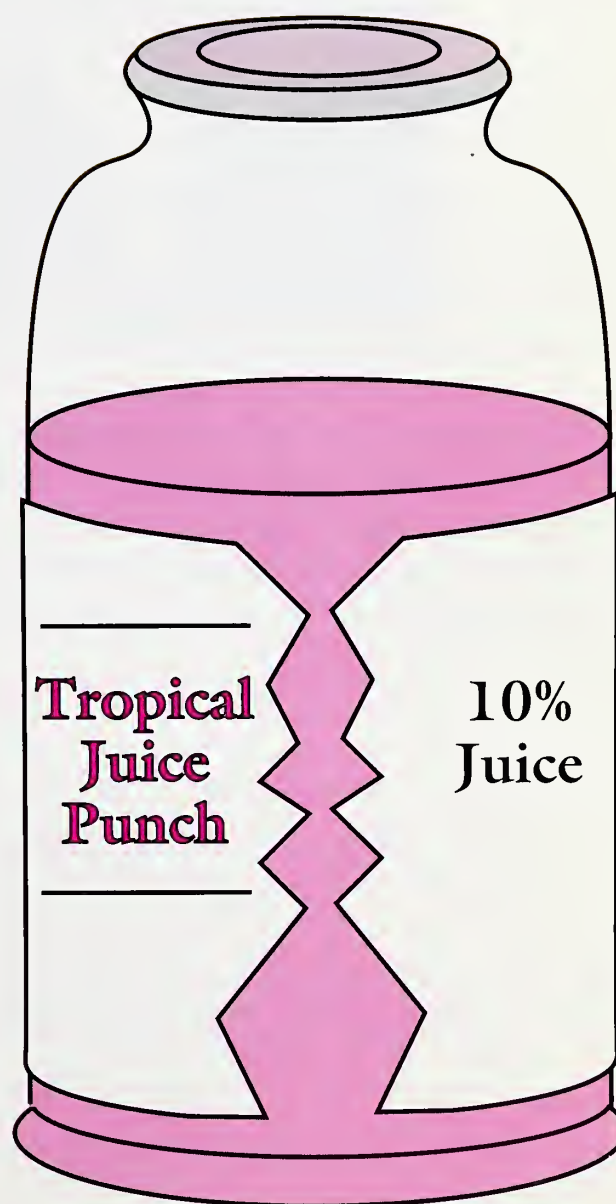


Ingredient Labeling— What's in a Food?

The ingredient list also can help you learn more about the foods you eat. A list of ingredients is required on almost all foods, even standardized ones like mayonnaise and bread. Ingredients are listed in descending order of weight. That helps you get an idea of the proportion of an ingredient in a food.

Also, artificial colors have to be named in the ingredient list; they no longer can be stated simply as “coloring.”

And the total percentage of juice in juice drinks must be declared so that you can see exactly how much juice is in a product.





Planning a Healthier Diet

Whether you eat a regular diet or follow a special one, the new food label can serve as an important guide to better nutrition—but only if you use it.

- **Start with the front of the package.** Look for claims. You can believe them. They tell you truthfully at a glance if a food is high or low in a particular nutrient—for example, “high in fiber” or “low in fat.” Claims also can help you avoid nutrients that are linked to the risk of a disease or health-related condition—for example, sodium and the risk of high blood pressure.



• **Refer to the “Nutrition Facts,”** usually on the side or back of the package, for more detailed information. Nutrition information will be on almost all processed foods. (It may also be displayed—voluntarily—at the point of purchase for many fresh fruits and vegetables and raw meat, poultry and fish). So you’ll be able to learn about the nutritional qualities of almost all of the foods you buy.

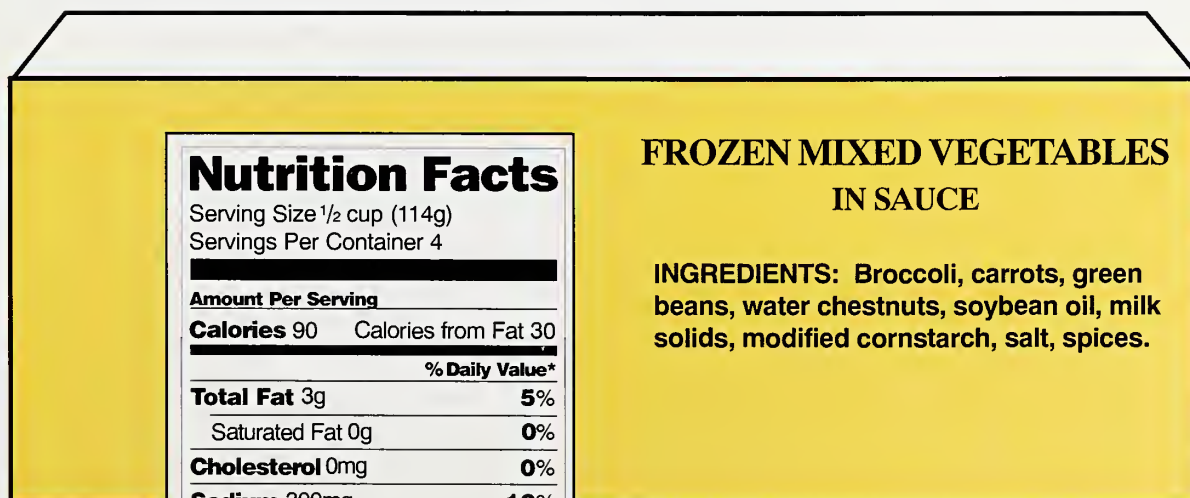
• **Pay attention to the serving size.** That’s what the nutrient amounts are based on. So if you eat more, or less, than the serving

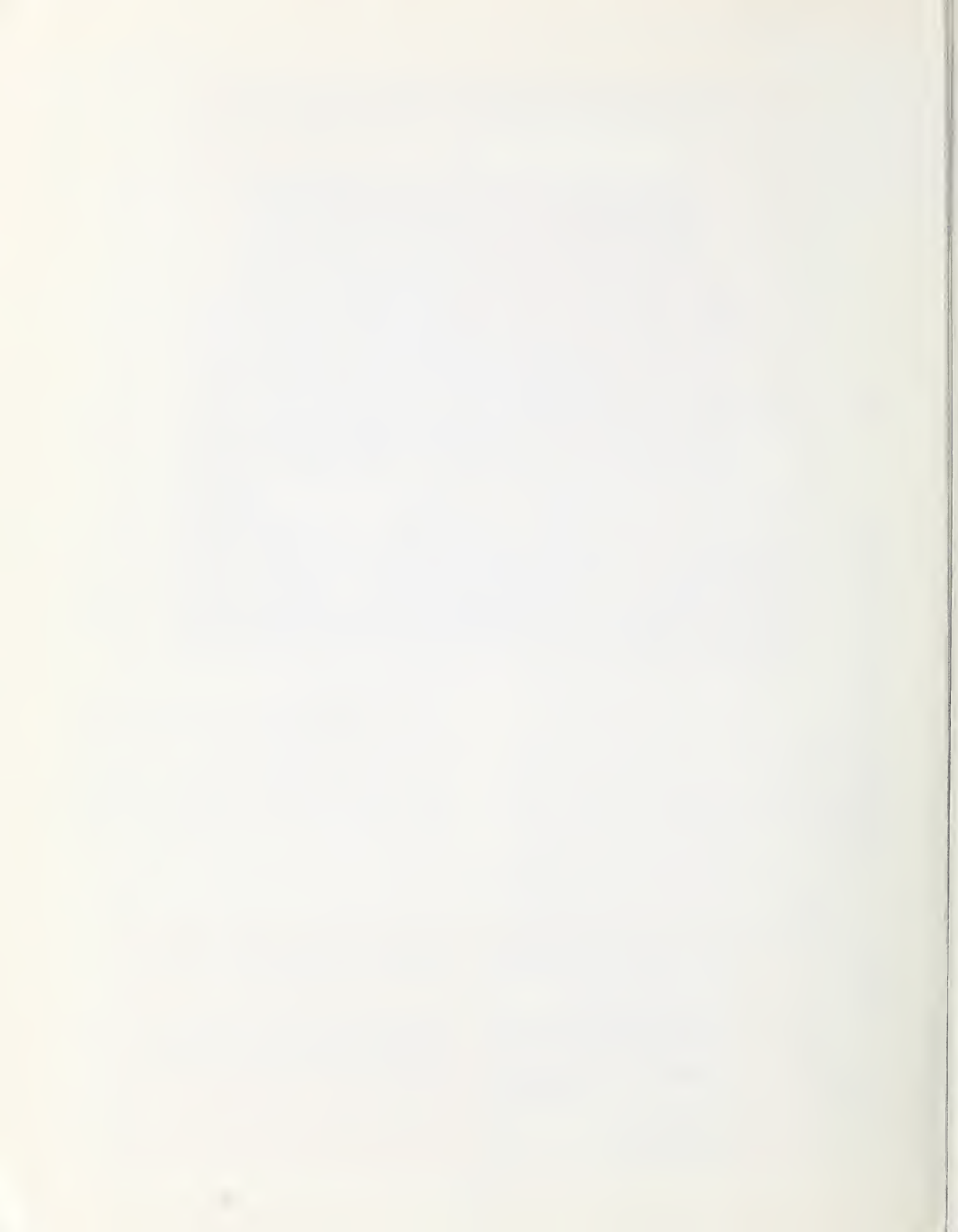
size listed, you need to adjust the calories and nutrient amounts accordingly.

• **Use the %Daily Values** to compare foods and see how a food fits into your total daily diet. Compare %Daily Values among similar products to help you choose the most healthful product.

• **Look at the ingredient list,** especially if you have food allergies or avoid certain ingredients for other reasons.

So, you see, it’s easier than ever to know about the foods you eat. Just read the label. It can help you set a healthy table.





**If you have questions about the new
food label, write to:**

Food and Drug Administration
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Rockville, MD 20857

Food Safety Education
USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service
Room 1180-South,
14th St. & Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Or call (toll-free):

USDA
(1-800) 535-4555
(10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time)

FDA
(1-800) FDA-4010
(24 hours)

Or contact your local or regional FDA
public affairs specialists or Cooperative
Extension Service educators. Look for their
numbers in the blue pages of the phone
book.



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